

# Frequently Asked Questions – Measles outbreak in Melbourne

17 March 2016 (update)

## People with immediate concerns

### **I have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with measles – what should I do?**

If you've been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with measles and you are not immune to measles (either from two doses of measles vaccine or from having recovered from measles infection in the past), you should visit your doctor even if you are not feeling sick. Call ahead to your doctor and advise them of your situation. This will give them a chance to take steps that will minimise the risk of potentially spreading the infection at their service, for example taking you to a separate room on arrival.

Your doctor will advise you of the different treatment options which will depend on how long it was since you were in contact with the infected person.

People can contract and spread the virus for several days before symptoms begin to show.

For more information on measles, including complications, diagnoses and treatment see the [Better Health Channel](#).

If you are certain that you have had two doses of the measles vaccine, the likelihood of you catching measles is very low. Two doses of the measles vaccine will prevent illness in around 99 per cent of people.

### **How can I be certain that I am immune to measles?**

Having documented evidence of two doses of measles vaccine is the best way to be certain.

The majority of people born before 1966 will have been exposed to measles when they were growing up and will be immune.

A doctor can determine your immunity with a blood test.

### **I have symptoms of measles – what should I do?**

The symptoms associated with measles – fever, runny nose, dry cough, sore eyes, skin rash - are also associated with a range of more common illnesses. Two doses of the measles vaccine will prevent illness in around 99 per cent of people

If you do not have immunity to measles – either from two doses of the vaccine or from having the disease in the past – call your doctor or NURSE-ON-CALL (1300 60 60 24) for advice.

### **My child has/had a rash. Is it measles?**

There are a large range of causes for rashes in children. If your child has received their scheduled measles vaccines, then the chance of measles infection is very low. Two doses of the measles vaccine will prevent illness in around 99 per cent of people. Children in Victoria receive measles vaccine at 12 months and 18 months of age.

If your child is not immunised and/or has been in contact with a person diagnosed with measles, call your doctor or NURSE-ON-CALL for advice.

## **How can I protect my baby who is too young to be vaccinated against measles?**

Check your own immunisation status. The best way to protect young babies is to ensure that those in close contact with the baby are immunised.

Check your immunisation documentation for a record of two doses of measles vaccine.

If you are fully immunised for measles your baby will have received some immunity from you during pregnancy.

You can have a blood test to see if you are immune to measles. See your doctor for advice.

## About the measles outbreak in Melbourne

### **Who has measles and how did they get it?**

To date, 23 people in Melbourne have contracted the disease. At the beginning of this outbreak Brunswick and surrounding areas were most affected but cases are now occurring in other suburbs. Most cases of measles in Victoria in recent years originate from returned travellers who have visited a measles-affected country. Whether this has been the situation with the current outbreak is unclear.

### **I am worried that measles might be occurring in my area – what should I do?**

Check your own immunisation status. If you have not received two doses of measles vaccine you should consider getting immunised immediately. If you were born before 1966 there is a very high probability that you are already immune. If you were born between 1966 and 1982 you grew up in a time when only one or no measles vaccine was provided and you may be at greater risk.

### **I run a business or organisation in an area where I have heard measles has occurred – what should I do?**

Unless you are specifically contacted by the Department of Health and Human Services you do not need to do anything. Businesses and organisations where infected persons have visited are being contacted by the department where necessary.

### **How likely is it that there will be more cases of measles?**

It is not possible to accurately predict the scale of the spread of infection at this stage. 'Herd immunity' through vaccination in the broader population is already helping to contain the outbreak to a relatively small number of cases than would otherwise have occurred. But measles is a highly infectious disease. The virus can persist for up to half an hour in an airspace where an infected person has coughed or sneezed, and infect people who are not fully vaccinated. If no new cases of measles are confirmed by end-March 2016 then the risk of further spread is very small. This is when all the currently known cases will no longer be infectious.

### **How does the Department of Health and Human Services respond to outbreaks?**

Public Health Officers interview those infected with the disease to try and discover the source of infection and the potential for further cases. Those people who have been infected are advised to take measures to limit the chances of spreading the disease further, such as staying at home and avoiding contact with others or being isolated from other patients in a hospital. Where necessary the department also contacts businesses, schools and other organisations where an infectious person has been and advises of necessary steps or precautions.

# About measles

## Why are we worried about measles?

- For every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die from it.
- About one out of every 15 children with measles gets pneumonia, the most common cause of death from measles in young children.
- About one child out of every 1,000 who get measles will develop encephalitis (swelling of the brain) that can lead to convulsions and can leave the child deaf or with intellectual disability.
- Ear infections occur in about one out of every 10 children with measles and can result in permanent hearing loss.
- Measles may cause pregnant woman to give birth prematurely, or have a low-birth-weight baby.

## What are the symptoms of measles?

The signs and symptoms of measles may include:

- fever
- general discomfort, illness or lack of wellbeing (malaise)
- runny nose
- dry cough
- sore and red eyes (conjunctivitis)
- red and bluish spots inside the mouth (Koplik's spots)
- red and blotchy skin rash that appears first on the face and hairline, and then spreads to the body
- diarrhoea will be a symptom for around 1 in 10 infected people.

For more information on measles, including complications, diagnoses and treatment see the [Better Health Channel](#).

## Who is most at risk of catching measles?

Children and adults born during or after 1966 who have not had two doses of the measles vaccine are most at risk.

Adults born between 1966 and 1985 should check their immunisation status and consider being vaccinated if they have not received two doses of measles vaccine. Adults in this age group may have received only one dose of measles vaccine.

Parents of babies and children too young to be vaccinated can check their own immunisation status and consider being vaccinated if they have not received two doses of measles vaccine.

## What is the difference between 'German Measles' and measles?

Rubella is sometimes called German measles, but rubella is a different viral disease to measles. A rubella infection is mild for most people, but it can have serious consequences for an unborn baby. If a pregnant woman contracts rubella, her baby is at risk of severe and permanent birth defects or death. Vaccination against rubella is often combined with vaccination for measles and mumps in the MMR (Measles-Mumps-Rubella) vaccine.

# About the measles vaccine

## How effective is the measles vaccine?

The measles vaccine is one of the most effective vaccines available. Two doses of the measles vaccine will prevent illness in around 99 per cent of people.

## Can I get the measles vaccine for free?

Children can receive the free Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccine at 12 months and 18 months of age.

Women of child bearing age who have low or negative rubella immunity (as determined by a blood test) can receive the MMR vaccine free of charge under the Victorian government's initiative to ensure women are protected against rubella prior to becoming pregnant.

Unvaccinated people under 20 can also receive the free MMR vaccine under the federal government's catch-up campaign.

## When is measles vaccine given to children?

The measles vaccine (given as the Measles-Mumps-Rubella or MMR vaccine) is offered free to children at 12 months and the second dose is delivered at 18 months of age (in the form of the Measles-Mumps-Rubella-Chickenpox vaccine).

Children can receive a catch-up MMR vaccine free if they are older than 18 months and have not had two doses of measles vaccine.

## What should I do if I am not vaccinated/unsure if I am vaccinated against measles?

If you are not vaccinated against measles or are unsure if you have had measles or if you have received two doses of the MMR vaccine, talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated.

## How can I find out more?

The Better Health Channel has the following relevant fact sheets:

- [Measles](#)
- [Measles- Mumps-Rubella-Varicella \(chickenpox\) vaccine](#)

The Acting Chief Health Officer has issued an alert:

- [Measles outbreak in the Brunswick area](#)

Measles and measles vaccine information in other languages:

- [Health Translations website](#)

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